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told me that he had persuaded a lesser sheikh to drink a bottle of rye.

A Shiekh, it may be explained, is another name for Chief, although nowadays many of these petty rulers regard themselves as Princes; their desert forts have become palaces, and the advisers and secretaries who form the 'court' have been elevated to the rank of Ministers. This local grandeur is self-assumed, and the only genuine Prince in the Oman peninsula is the Sultan of Muscat. The Bedouins jokingly refer to the town sheikhs as 'Sand Kings', and the description seems to be an apt one.

The word 'sheikh' is fairly common as a name in Arabia, although it does not connote royal blood or connexions; we had a coolie in the Fort who was called Sheikh Ahmed. Similarly, the word 'Saiyed' is much used as a name, but bears no relation to the title Saiyed, borne by alleged lineal descendants of the Prophet or his son-in-law.

The Arab world has practised the doctrines of Islam for close on thirteen centuries, yet even to-day one finds the people accepting ancient beliefs and superstitions which are the heritage of heathenism. The uneducated Arab firmly believes in the existence of djinns, and nothing will persuade him to venture near a *wadhi* or deserted building which tradition has made the home of these monsters. Good and bad luck are ascribed by the faithful to Allah, Whose ways are wise and inscrutable; yet even the orthodox will admit—a trifle shamefacedly, perhaps—that such and such a calamity was caused by a malicious djinn, or that the death of his favourite camel was due to the evil eye of a neighbour.

Demoniacal possessions are cured by dancing to the throb of drums, a survival, surely, of African rites, and it is significant that most of these primitive beliefs are held by Arabs of African or negro descent. But then, is there such a thing as a pure-blooded Arab? I have heard people describe themselves as being pure-blooded Irish, although they had less claim to consanguine purity than myself; they took no account of the Danish, Norman, Spanish and English invasions which swept the length and breadth of that small island over a thousand years. Just as the Irishman is basically Celt, the Arab is basically Semitic, but even the greatest ethnologist or anthropologist cannot track down with absolute certainty the ultimate origins of the Arab race; if it is one race. Head-measurements and the division of skulls into brachycephalic and dolchycephalic are all very well; they are useful for classifying the human

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On the way back to Sharjah we passed a squat, white building about two miles from the town. It was built by a wealthy merchant of Dubai and presented to the town as a lazar, or leper hospital. Yet to this day it has never been used, for the local tradition is that it is haunted by a djinn, or evil spirit. Arabs suffering from leprosy, who have been turned out of the town, will prefer to stay in the open desert than enter the accursed house. Belief in djinns is very strong in Oman, though I have never before heard of a new building being haunted. It is probable, as with Chinese houses, that they are considered to be unlucky if they are built on a spot which has an evil reputation and is not protected by *fung-shui*, as the Cantonese call 'fortunate winds'.

That evening, accompanied by two officers from the Fort, I attended an Arab wedding which was held outside the sheikh's palace. The bridegroom was one of our mechanics; he already possessed one wife and three children, but he had recently been given a rise in pay and, being a true follower of the Prophet, wished to increase the dignity of his household. The marriage ceremony was held in the mosque and directly the happy couple emerged they were surrounded by a vast crowd of relatives, friends and sightseers. A small band, consisting of drums and pipes, led the procession, which soon grew to two or three hundred persons. Behind the band was the bridegroom, seated on a camel with two of his sons, his eyes tightly bandaged so that he should not see his bride, who followed blushingly on a donkey.

The procession halted in front of the palace and a rhythmic tune of pipe and drum sent the onlookers into a frenzied dance, in which we were expected to join. A young man in a green turban, whom I recognized as one of our bearers, leapt into the middle of the dancers and began to sing a passionate love-song. There was a good deal of abandon, giggling amongst the women, and flirtation, all the usual Arab restraint being flung to the winds. The music and dancing continued until sunset, when torches and flares were lit and the procession repaired to a village two miles away. We did not attend the nuptial feast, which I heard later ended in an orgy, with several broken heads, as I had another engagement at the Iraqui Levies' camp. I felt very sorry for the bridegroom's first wife; she was a sad and lonely figure on her little brown donkey, and seemed to be the only one who did not enjoy the carousing. This was not surprising,